

August 2nd '77

Dear B.,

You said that you prepared with Richard the Asaika Puja. Would you let me know how it was? And also your Dhamma conversations with Jill? When Sarah and Ann were here I found it so encouraging for more study, it never is enough. We listened to the tape of Khen Sujin where she explains about parināmas, and we looked it up in the Visuddhi'magga (Ch. XX, 1-4). While talking with others about suttas, one is inspired to read more, I am going to read the 'Maha-Faribbana-sutta' with Mand and I have found already that while reading one sutta, I read many other suttas and their commentaries as well, in order to get to the meaning of matters. Which list of suttas is Richard using for his group of friends?

Now your questions. You say that not everyone has accumulations for satti-patthana and that many like to practice meditation in the morning and evening in order to have calmness so that they can cope better with their problems. Although they do not develop jhana, they seem to be calmer. You remark that most meditation practices encourage people to be kinder, and more generous. And this is always beneficial, as you say. At the same time you realise that problems in life are not just solved by calmness. You also asked how much kusala is involved in the way people practice meditation today. You find it difficult to give anybody any advice on what to develop.

What should be known before one starts to 'practice' any kind of meditation? One should know what is meditation, what is calmness which is wholesome, when are kusala cittas arising and when akusala cittas, what is right understanding in samatha and what is right understanding in vipassana and which objects do these two kinds of understanding know. (See for this also my Sri Lanka report).

Some basic knowledge of the Abhidhamma is also indispensable for samatha I think. We should know that citta (consciousness) arises and falls away. That kusala citta (wholesome consciousness) is completely different from akusala citta (unwholesome consciousness), that akusala cittas can arise very shortly after kusala citta has fallen away. If we do not know this, we mislead ourselves all the time. When the

citta is kusala, there is no moha (ignorance of realities), lobha (attachment) or dosa (aversion). Moha, lobha and dosa are akusala. Even when there is slight attachment the citta is akusala. All this sounds simple in theory, but how difficult to realise it when the citta is kusala and when akusala. How soon attachment arises after kusala citta has fallen away. How difficult to know when there is moha-mula-citta, and still, we know that there are many in a day.

For the mental development which is samatha it is necessary to know when the citta is kusala and when it is akusala. That is why there must be right understanding accompanying the kusala citta which cultivates samatha. There can be dāna and sīla with or without pañña, but samatha cannot be without pañña, or it is not samatha. Samatha is a higher form of kusala than dāna and sīla and thus it should be encouraged, but then it must be real samatha, accompanied by right understanding.

It is difficult to have kusala citta arise, we cannot plan kusala citta. It is even more difficult to have kusala citta with pañña arise, we cannot plan it. When we sit down it does not mean that automatically kusala citta with pañña arises. When people use the word meditation they usually think of having to sit down and trying to concentrate on something. It is better to use the word bhavana instead of meditation. Bhavana is mental development, and for this pañña is indispensable. There are two kinds of bhavana: samatha and vipassana. I will first say a few more things about samatha.

The right understanding in samatha has to know when the citta is kusala and when it is akusala. Very difficult indeed. It has to know what wholesome calmness is. We use the word calmness so loosely, but it has to be kusala. It is not the same as what we mean by calmness in conventional sense, where it is used so widely.

What is calmness which is kusala? When we help others the citta is kusala and it has calmness. Each kusala citta has a degree of calmness. In samatha calmness is cultivated with right understanding. People in the Buddha's time had accumulations for calmness of absorption concentration, but, even if one does not have such accumulations, there can be moments of calmness in daily life, moments of samatha also while one is working. It depends on the right understanding whether this is possible or not. Right understanding of calmness and of the object of samatha condition calmness.

Not trying very hard to concentrate, then there is bound to be lobha or dosa (aversion when it is so hard.) It is right understanding which sees the disadvantages of defilements and which knows to ~~avoid~~ cultivate conditions for calmness, being temporarily away from defilements. Still, we have to remember that the wholesome calmness does not stay, it arises and falls away with the citta. Since kusala citta is so rare in comparison with akusala citta, and pañña accompanying kusala citta is even rarer, one should not mislead oneself into thinking that there is calmness for a long time, for example, during the time one has set aside for samatha in the morning and evening. Misleading oneself is the worst thing one can do. One may so easily think that one cultivates samatha while it is not samatha at all.

For samatha there has to be right understanding of the object of meditation, whatever object among the forty (described in the Visuddhimagga) one takes. Why are there forty objects, is it not possible to make a change in this? For example, some people say that it does not matter that one is not aware of breath at the nosetip, one may be of the movement of the abdomen. Yes, breath is one of the most difficult subjects of meditation, it is so subtle. Most important is to think in the right way of breath: this very small matter on which our life depends. We find our life so important, our body so important, and see, on this very subtle matter which is breath, depends. If we take the movement of the abdomen instead, we miss the point. We are then busy with what? With "my body" which is so important. It induces clinging instead of detachment from the body. ~~(The best)~~ But everyone should check this for himself. The more we consider the forty objects of samatha the more we see that they are meaningless, that we cannot just concentrate on anything.

It often happens that people do a kind of combination of yoga exercise and 'breath', but they do not really get what breath is. The effect, a feeling of well-being, they breathe better, more bodily health and relaxation. But this is different from calmness which is wholesome, calmness which goes together with detachment. We cannot tell whether someone else is calm by his appearance. Calmness ~~which~~ which accompanies kusala citta arises and falls away, it does not stay.

There are many other objects of samatha: corpses, parts of the body, recollection of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. It depends on ones accumulation which object is helpful to have calmness, being away for a few moments from lobha, dosa and moha. It may happen that one moment the object is parts of the body and the next moment recollection of the Buddha. It may change from moment to moment.

Is there no concentration in samatha? There is, but it arises because of conditions; right understanding of the object of samatha and of the way to cultivate calmness conditions the concentration which accompanies it. No need to try to concentrate. Concentration (akaggata cetasika) arises with every citta and its quality is different according as it accompanies different types of citta. The concentration which accompanies jhanacitta is different from the concentration of citta which begins to develop samatha. But if one sits down and thinks: How I must concentrate, there is likely to be lobha or dosa. The monks in the Buddha's time who sat under the tree sat because it was natural for them. They had such accumulation for samatha such right understanding of calmness that it conditioned jhana. No painful trying and forcing. Again, right understanding and the calmness which is wholesome have to be emphasised, not concentration.

People start 'meditation' because they find satipatthana so difficult. But samatha, real samatha is difficult. How much kusalā is involved when people set aside time in the morning and in the evening, in order to 'meditate', was one of your questions. It depends on the citta from moment to moment. If one tries very hard to concentrate on something one may take for kusalā what is not kusalā. That is not beneficial. One may find a more fruitful time in reading about the objects of meditation in the Visuddhimagga. This is very good reading with many quotations from the scriptures. When one reads about the brahmarupearas of metta, karuṇā, mudita and upēkkhā it may remind one to practice these virtues during the day. If one does not practice them and they never arise, how can one use them as a meditation subject for calmness? One should for example know the characteristic of metta in order that one can use it for having more and more calmness while one recollects it. Reading the Suttas and studying the Abhidhamma is also very profitable if one wants to set aside a certain time for Dhamma. But it is good to remember that we cannot plan kusalā. Sometimes it is time for dāna, at other times for sīla, for samatha or for satipatthana. While one is reading with right understanding it is also bhāraṇa. Certainly better than practising something which is not real samatha.

Some people say that when they practice 'intensive meditation' their mind is clearer and they have more sati of satipatthana. The question is now. What does the right understanding of vipassana have to know? The *namas* and *rupas* which appear right now through one of the six doors, one at a time. The *pañña* of vipassana knows not concepts such as person, body, flower, it knows through direct experience realities such as hardness, visible object, seeing, sound or hearing. If someone thinks that he has to do intensive meditation before he can know *namas* and *rupas*, it is useful to check whether one knows after this meditation seeing now, different from visible object which appears now, hearing which appears now, different from sound. The difference between *nama* and *rupa* has to be known through direct experience before there can be experience of their arising and falling away (which is a later stage of insight knowledge). It is already difficult to know the difference between *nama* and *rupa*, we all join them together. If we are quite honest with ourselves, do we know seeing as different from visible object, or do they seem to appear together? Then there is no right awareness yet.

It is not clear what is meant by intensive meditation. Is it the right practice of *Samatha*? Right understanding of the object of *Samatha* and right understanding of wholesome calmness? Or is it trying to concentrate with desire? Does the meditator know exactly, very precisely when the *citta* is *kusala* or with *pañña* and when *akusala citta* with desire?

Samatha when it is the right practice is wholesome. But a stepping stone for vipassana? When we read the *Visuddhi Magga* we see that the development is described of people who have great accumulations and can cultivate *jhana* before they develop vipassana. But even so, after they emerge from *jhana* they have to be mindful of *nama* and *rupa*, any reality which appears. This is very clearly described in the chapter about mindfulness of breathing. Nowhere in the teachings is it said that everybody must develop *Samatha* before he develops vipassana. If they can, it is excellent, because *jhana* is a high degree of *kusala*. But *jhana* is very difficult, only very few people can attain it, it is said in the *Visuddhi Magga*. Also access concentration is very difficult, only very few people can make it. When there is no right understanding, one may easily mistake a kind of sensation for access concentration or for *jhana*. One has to be very honest with oneself. Desire can mislead us all the time.

Before one can in vipassana know through direct experience *nama* as *nama* and *rupa* as *rupa*, *no nama* as not self, *rupa* as not self, should there not be intellectual understanding of *nama* and *rupa*?

If one does not know what has to be known how could one practice? In *Samatha* the *pañña* knows for example *metta* and it knows how to become calm with *metta*. It does not know *metta* as not self, calmness as not self. How could one know *metta* as not self?

6.

In having first intellectual understanding of the different namas and rupas which appear now, and then through direct experience of the nama or rupa which appears. When metta appears, it should be known clearly as different from feelings, different from rupa. This means that not only metta should be known, but many different namas and rupas, any reality which appears now. Thus, intellectual understanding of nama and rupa is necessary in any case, no matter whether one develops samatha or not.

Bhāṇa, sīla, samatha and vipassana are kusala kamma and all of them should be encouraged. Moments of calmness in daily life can occur when there is right understanding of that level. But, as you say, samatha does not solve the problems of our life. When there is calmness one is for that moment not entranced by the sensuous objects. But that moment falls away. Then there is seeing again, or hearing again. What happens then? We are attached to visible objects, to sound, entranced by them, we take them to something or somebody (wrong view) or we have aversion about them. We still have to cope with all the objects which appear through the six doors.

Wrong view, taking realities for self causes us to have many problems. 'The other person is so unpleasant to me', we keep on thinking. There are always persons and they seem to last.

Wrong view. If we see the disadvantages of wrong view, a distorted view of realities, we want to develop right understanding, since it is the only way to cope with our problems.

The more we see that namas and rupas are only elements which arise because of conditions, the less will we believe in a self. We read in the 'Kindred Sayings' (IV, Saṅgāyana-vagga, Fourth Fifty, ch. 3, para. 193) that Uddāyini asked Ananda whether it is possible just as the body has been explained as without a self, also to explain consciousness as being without the self. Ananda said that this is possible. He asked:

'Owing to the eye and object arises eye-consciousness, does it not, friend?'

'Yes, friend.'

'Well, if the condition, if the cause of the arising of eye-consciousness should altogether, in every way, utterly come to cease without remainder, would any eye-consciousness be evident?'

'Surely not, friend.'

'Well, friend, it is by this method that the Exalted One has explained, opened up, and shown that this consciousness also is without self.'

The same is said about tongue-consciousness and mind-consciousness. Ananda then uses a simile of someone who cuts down a tree, in search of heart of wood:

..... Having cut it down at the root he chops it off at the top. Having done so he peels off the outer skin. But he would find no pith inside. Much less would he find heart of wood.

Even so, friend, a monk beholds no trace of the self nor that pertains to the self in the sixfold sense-sphere. So beholding, he is attached to nothing in the world. Unattached, he is not troubled. Untroubled, he is of himself utterly set free, so that he realises, 'Destroyed is rebirth. Lived is the righteous life. Done is the task. For life in these conditions there is no hereafter.'

Note the end: "unattached, he is not troubled." No more problems. Only through vipassana, mindfulness of *nama*s and *rupa*s, problems can be solved. We have to face the objects experienced through the six doors. It does not really help to get away from them and to concentrate on a particular object of meditation.

It is often said: vipassana is too difficult. Even *samatha* if it is right practice is also difficult. At least we could start with intellectual understanding of the realities which appear now, in daily life. Even intellectual understanding is helpful, in order to start thinking in the right way about our problems in daily life. What is the other person: *nama* and *rupa*. What are we? *Nama* and *rupa*.

It is difficult to know the difference between the sense-door and the mind-door. Between seeing, the experience of visible object and the paying of attention to shape and form, which is thinking of concepts. *Khun Sujin* explains this time and again. We consider realities for a few moments while she is explaining, and maybe a few moments more during the day. Then the next day we still do not clearly know what visible object is, what seeing is, and we still seem to see people and things. In theory we know that we cannot see people, person is only a concept we can think about, only visible object can appear through the eye-sense. We become impatient. Isn't that crazy? How many times have we studied *nama* and *rupa* with awareness? Maybe just a few times and then we become impatient that we do not clearly know them as they are. We expect the impossible.

Some people when they become bored with considering seeing, visible object, hearing or sound, want to free from them and would rather only develop *samatha*. This does not solve any problems. The Buddha told the monks who developed *samatha*: 'There is a further escape. *Samatha* is not enough. (Middle Length sayings, III p 78.) The Buddha asked *Sariputta*, who explained about *samatha* to a dying brahman why he had not explained to him about vipassana (Middle Length sayings II, p. 379)

To monks the Buddha put it very strongly that if they did not develop *sati*patthana and know realities as they are, they had not attained the goal of their going forth. We read in the Kindred sayings (II kindred sayings on Elements, 4, par. 37) that the Buddha said

to the monks:

.... There are four elements, monks - which are the four?
Earth-element, water -, heat --, air-element.

Verily, any recluses or brahmins whatever who do not understand, even as it really is, the satisfaction, the misery, the escape with regard to these four elements, they for me are not approved of among recluses as recluses nor among brahmins as brahmins, nor have those venerable ones come even in this life fully to know of themselves, to realise, to live in the attainment of, the good of being recluse or brahmin,

In the following sutta, the same is said about realising the arising and the ceasing of the four elements.

If one better understands, at least intellectually, how the phenomena in our life needs conditions and cannot be hastened, it helps one to be more patient when one does not see nama and rupa as they are the next day or next week. One will have more patience to consider more, to study more with awareness the different namas and rupas which appear. The more one sees that this is the only way to solve the problems in ones life, the more one is motivated to study. Reading the scriptures can give so many reminders to keep on studying all phenomena which appear through the six doors, one at a time. When there is more patience there is more calmness. One will discover that also in vipassana there is calmness. If unpleasant feeling appears, that is the reality which should be studied at that moment, as only an element, not very important, it does not belong to me. In this way one can even become ~~more~~ calm about unpleasant feeling and about dosa! In samatha one suppresses it, in vipassana one studies it.